



**From a ‘World-system’ to a Social Science Knowledge  
‘Scape’ Perspective: Anthropological Fieldworking and  
Transnationalising Theory-making in the ‘Periphery’**

**Zawawi Ibrahim**

Professor, Institute of Asian Studies & Faculty of Arts and  
Social Science, Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

wzi1947@gmail.com

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**Abstract**

This article represents an anthropological engagement with the question of social science knowledge production in the context of a ‘world-system’ (Kuwayama, 2004) where the construction of its theoretical base has historically been identified with the ‘centre’ rather than the ‘periphery’. The Japanese anthropologist, Kuwayama, adapted the term from Wallerstein, to refer specifically to anthropology as a ‘world-system’, which is shared unequally between the ‘centre’, ‘semi-periphery’ and ‘periphery’. It is not surprising therefore that given this uneven epistemic playing ground, allegations of theoretical “underdevelopment” and “knowledge dependency” have been directed towards social science scholarship in the ‘periphery’ (King, 2008). Thus far, the epistemological responses from the ‘periphery’ have been articulated in the form of discourses such as ‘decolonising anthropology’, ‘Provincialising Europe’ and ‘indigenisation’ as a way of countering Eurocentrism (colonial knowledge) and the dominant ‘Anglo-American’ theoretical template (Chakranarty, 2000; Atal, 1981; S. Hussein Alatas, 1977; S. Farid Alatas, 2006). Taking a lead from Appadurai’s notions of ‘scapes’ (2005), the article attempts to elevate Kuwayama’s ‘world-system’ conception to another epistemic level, i.e the recognition of a ‘missing scape’ – a social science knowledge ‘scape’ (Zawawi 2013: 1-2) which is transnational, uneven and contested, but yet privileges an interactive playing field for possible theoretical exchanges and synthesis between knowledge producers from both ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ who occupy this ‘scape’. In its original vision, the idea of ‘scape’ is multidirectional, more

fluid and ‘flowy’ than a ‘world-system’ concept and to some extent, this dilutes the rigid distinction between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ found in the latter. For anthropology, the possibility of such a transnational synthesis is premised upon an understanding that fieldworking in the ‘periphery’ is not only a site for collecting empirical data but that it also functions as a base for reworking with and innovating upon existing theoretical and conceptual formulations. It is important to remind ourselves that a fundamental principle in social science is that theory-building is based upon an ongoing dialectical relationship between theoretical practice and empirical research. The outcome of this is essentially a ‘hybrid’, in the form of a theoretical synthesis which is transnational in its genesis. This means that its origin is neither at the ‘centre’ nor ‘periphery’, but one which draws its analytical resources from both the corpus of theoretical knowledge established at the ‘centre’, as well as from the conceptual nuances which are activated through research, derived from the local, cultural and indigenous empirical domain of the ‘periphery’. Hence, anthropological fieldworking becomes an essential, critical site and link in this transnational-cum-‘hybridised’ theory-making project.. The case study will revolve around problematizing Marxist theoretical formulations of ‘class consciousness’ and class ideological practice from the ‘centre’ to the ‘periphery’, mediated by my own fieldworking among Malay working class in plantation society.

**Keywords:** ‘world system’, social science knowledge ‘scape’, transnationalising, hybridisation, indigenisation, anthropology, fieldworking.

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This article represents an attempt to revisit and engage with some of the epistemological questions raised by Asian or non-western scholarship in relation to its contribution to the production of social science knowledge in a globalising world. In a recent review of Asian anthropologies, the Japanese anthropologist Takami Kuwayama (2004: 37), positions this knowledge as occupying the ‘periphery’ within the global framework of a ‘world-system’ of anthropology, with work produced in the USA, Britain and France dominating the ‘centre’ of anthropological knowledge production. Japanese anthropology, on the basis of its unique historical trajectory, has been privileged with a ‘semi-peripheral’ position (*Ibid.*: 39). While Asian social sciences, including anthropology and sociology, continue to flourish and can no longer be seen as a purely western import (Fahim, 1982; Yamashita *et al.*, 2004: 1-2), critics still lament the ‘underdevelopment’ of (Southeast) Asian social science and the ‘visible knowledge dependency’ of Asian scholarship on western-based concepts and theories (Evers, cited by King, 2008: 20-23).

Obviously, the issues at stake between the centre and periphery of knowledge production in social science are complex and multilayered. Historically, western

imperialism was not only the harbinger of economic and political domination but also of knowledge hegemony on a worldwide scale. This correlation between power and knowledge persists in the postcolonial global era. Theoretical production in social science, for instance, has historically been identified predominantly with the 'centre' rather than the 'periphery'. For a long time, the latter has been reduced to the position of receiver and consumer of theoretical knowledge, rather than its initiator or producer. At most, the periphery remains a laboratory of rich empirical data for western social scientists to investigate and utilise at will when undertaking their research, and ultimately to create new theories or engage in current theoretical discourses pertaining to the 'periphery'. Hence the articulation a distinctive Southeast Asian or Asian epistemology in the globalising age has to confront the epistemological imperatives of "a North American style of knowing" (Goh, 2012) or what Anthony Reid (2012) refers to as "the new intellectual hegemony" of the 'Anglo-American code'.

### **Epistemological Responses from the 'Periphery': Towards a 'Decolonising Anthropology' Discourse?**

In my journey as an anthropologist, I have never ceased to be amazed by the eloquence of the indigenous people, whose narratives I have diligently been recording in celebration of both a postmodernist ethnography and a decolonising anthropology. (see Zawawi, 1996; 1997; 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2001). In many ways, the task of the anthropologist is made easier by the presence of these articulate speakers in his midst, for what they express are not only the facts but also the wisdom and knowledge to understand and interpret their landscape. For a long time, anthropology, as we were reminded way back by the insightful Levi Strauss, has created the indigenous as 'objects' of its research enterprise. However, the more I listen to their narratives, the more I have come to believe that it is these 'subjects' rather than the colonial anthropologists, who have been the true bearers of knowledge of the field. To a large extent, there has been a degree of mythologising which privileges the anthropologist as the authority who translates, interprets, and gives 'added value' to the raw data solicited from fieldwork. In so doing, the anthropologist apparently renders respectability to indigenous narratives and forms of knowledge, elevating them to the status of 'scientific knowledge'. This has been a part of the baggage of 'orientalism' and the colonising methodologies that has trapped western anthropology since its birth when dealing with indigenous people (Smith, 1999), and in the representation of 'the Other'.

Marsden, in his review of the place of indigenous knowledge under the domination of conventional scientific thought, echoes the above sentiments when he remarks that

(u)ntil relatively recently the dominant paradigm, which stressed the superiority of western objective, scientific rationality consigned 'other' forms of knowledge to positions of inferiority. It seems that the scientific tradition itself is the one that is 'traditional', endowed with magic, religion and superstition, as its tenets turn into dogma and as intellectual creativity is thereby stifled. 'Local', 'traditional or 'folk' knowledge is no longer the irrelevant vestige of 'backward' people who have not yet made the transition to modernity , but the vital well springs and resource bank from which alternative futures might be built (1994: 45-46).

Within postcolonial anthropology, the Maori anthropologist, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, representing the new imaginings of Maori indigenous anthropology, launches a vehement critique against colonial modes of epistemology and methodology that have rendered Maoris as mere objects of research. The 'calling' by Tuhiwai Smith is to move the 'indigenous' as 'agency' and 'subjects' in their own right, thereby empowering them to determine their own 'indigenous' research agenda through 'decolonising methodologies' (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In this context, I believe that Smith has moved her methodology beyond postmodernist ethnography (Fontana, 1994). Of the 25 indigenous projects that she advocates, they emphasise not only 'storytelling', but also 'claiming', remembering', 'indigenising', 'writing' and 'sharing'. . In my own story-telling research among the Penans of Sarawak, Borneo (Zawawi & NoorShah, 2012), I have utilised story-telling as a form of decolonising colonial methodology to unveil the Penan emic perspective and their 'subjugated discourse' (after Foucault) on 'development', as a counter-narration to the neo-liberal-driven 'developmentalism' of the Malaysian postcolonial state , which has dispossessed them of their rainforest nomadic ecology and other irreplaceable jungle resources through logging . Mediated by the narrations of Penghulu James of the Penan village of Long Lamai, in Ulu Baram, I have been able to articulate an indigenous perspective on 'deterritorialisation' and their 'reterritorialisation' imaginings, to unravel 'a representation of an indigenous notion of place, space and territory' in defence of Penan traditional claims to 'stewardship' over the land to contest the current bureaucratic 'rational-legal' and official discourse which governs the present Penan landscape (Zawawi, 2008, p 6, & pp. 75-92).

Among the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, for instance, indigenous storytelling and writing has already assumed momentum (see Zawawi, 1996; 1998b; Akiya, 2001; 2007). In Borneo, the island which locates the Penan, the Dayak intelligenstia of Kalimantan Indonesia have long been active in 'writing their own culture' through the

NGO movement, *Pancur Kasih*, and the formation of their own research and publication wing, IDR- *Institute of Dayakology Research and Development* which publishes the monthly *Kalimantan Review*, and books – all of which articulate and attempt to represent Dayak emic perspectives on culture and development (see Tamayo et.al., 2012; Alcorn, Janis and Antoinette G. Royo (eds.), 2000).

### **On 'Provincialising Europe'?**

It is Dipesh Chakranarty who in his *Provincialising Europe* (2000), acknowledges that “Europe has already been provincialised by history itself”, referring to the fact that in the 20th century, the locus of power has already shifted to outside Europe. However he astutely observes “the so-called European tradition is the only one alive in the social science departments of most, if not all, modern universities” (2000, p. 3). Habibul Khondker sees Chakranarty’s critique as one that envisions a move towards ‘genuine globalism’. He asserts that Chakranarty’s *Provincialising Europe* argument is not a recommendation for ‘cultural relativism’, nor is it an argument “to first contain Europe and its influence and then delink”. For him, “It is an argument for putting Europe and its influence into perspective, to curtail its earlier imperial notion and to open up a dialogue that would benefit all. This is not to recommend that Europe or the so-called West be the source of theories and concepts and the rest of the peripheral world be the empirical area for testing and refining these theories. The whole world can be the arena simultaneously for conceptual-theoretical innovations and empirical testing...It is true that Western social science can be quite parochial or provincial. What is important is to fight provincialism, for genuine globalism” (2012, p. 69).

### **'Indigenisation'?**

The interventionist ‘indigenisation’ discourse has been moved by scholars such as Atal (1981), S.Farid Alatas (1977) and S .Hussein Alatas (1977).

Atal refers to ‘indigenisation’ to mean “replacement of the exogenous, Western concepts by the local, endogenous ones; the latter means incorporation, localisation, and fine tuning of the concepts in the context of local circumstances” (cited in Khondker, 2012: 70). Atal emphasises the need for indigenising the exogenous elements to suit local requirements. As to whether this is undertaken by the ‘indigenous’ themselves or ‘outsiders’ “is a mere detail” (1981, p. 193).

Another indigenous scholar, S. Farid Alatas refers to the need to seek “alternative discourse in Asian social science as responses to Eurocentricism”, referring to ‘indigenisation’ as “a plurality of calls” (2006). On anthropology, citing Evans, he asserts:

“The indigenisation of anthropology cannot simply be understood in negative terms of delinking from metropolitan, neocolonialist control. It is also understood in a more positive way in terms of the contribution of non-Western systems of thought to anthropological theory” (p. 85). He insists that “ Non-Western thought and cultural practices are to be seen as sources of anthropological theorising, while at the same time Western anthropology is not to be rejected *in toto*”. Citing Sinha, he stresses that: “The indigenisation –of- anthropology projects is not conceived to be a ‘categorical rejection of all “Western” input in theorising’ and ‘does not seek to replace “Eurocentrism” with “nativism” or any other dogmatic position” (S. Farid Alatas, *ibid.* p. 85).

A critical epistemological question revolves around the imperative for Asian scholarship to decolonise itself from orientalist and Eurocentric forms of knowledge, the western discourse of the non-European that was eloquently critiqued in the influential writings of Edward Said (Said, 1979; S. Farid Alatas, 2006, pp. 42-45; Cohn, 1996). From the Asian world, the sociology of knowledge – based arguments by S. Hussein Alatas in *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) that actually preceded Said’s pathbreaking *Orientalism* and the perspectives reconstituted from various disciplines under the rubric of cultural studies – has played a vital role in advancing new understandings of how and why knowledge is produced and reproduced. In the above landmark work, S. Hussein Alatas is able to bring into the discourse both a critique of colonial knowledge ( i.e the colonial representation of the Malays as ‘lazy natives’ ) as well as of ‘indigenous’ perspectives which extend ‘the ‘colonial gaze’ into explaining the causes of Malay underdevelopment ( for instance, his critique of former Malaysian PM Mahathir’s famous treatise *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) and the Malay ruling elite’s orientalist response to Malay underdevelopment in *Mental Revolution* (1970)). In addition, the author is also able to enlighten us on Malay Islamic and indigenous values that are counter-narrations of British colonial and orientalist representations of the Malays (see Zawawi Ibrahim, 2012, pp. 165-200).

### **From Kuwayama’s “World System of Anthropology” to a “Social Science Knowledge ‘Scape”**

In elaborating upon Kuwayama’s ‘world-system’ perspective, I am reminded to revisit Arjun Appadurai’s well-known notion of the five dimensions of global ‘-scapes’. In his study of the cultural forms of modernity, and the global exchange of ideas and information, Appadurai (2005, pp. 48-65) highlights the fluidity of ‘flows’ emanating from all parts of global society, how they juxtapose with one another and touch us at so many interconnected levels. In Appadurai’s neologisms, these flows are comprised of

ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes, through which globalising and localising processes feed and reinforce each other. Taking a lead from Appadurai's notion of 'scapes', this article attempts to elevate Kuwayama's 'world-system' conception to another epistemic level, i.e the recognition of a 'missing scape' – a social science knowledge 'scape' (Zawawi 2013, pp. 1-2) which is multidirectional, transnational, global, uneven and contested, but yet allows for social science knowledge to move in multidirectional flows, as an interactive playing field for intellectual articulations and exchanges of knowledge (theories, concepts, and empirical research findings), between knowledge producers from both 'centre' and 'periphery' who belong to the epistemic community and occupy this 'scape'.

It is obvious that this 'scape' interweaves and interconnects in various ways with the other 'scapes' outlined in Appadurai's original schema. Similar to other global flows, our 'scape' also harbours its own differences and disjunctures. It is also characterised by its repertoire of binary constructs: global versus local, centre versus periphery, Orientalism and Eurocentrism or the colonial versus Occidentalism, the anticolonial or 'the Other'. Despite its critical ruptures, this social scientific scape has always been a laboratory and dialogical space capable of generating its own constructive exchanges – across borders, within or across nations, for collaborative work of the highest order, or for coming to terms with difference and diversity. Ultimately, it is a scape based on a universal collective. It is forged and consolidated by a certain shared critical consciousness within an epistemic community of global scholars whose *modus operandi* is defined by a 'sacred' framework, the fundamental principles of which have long been established.

The ideational contents embedded in the flow of this 'scape' are based on our disciplinary perspectives and empirical research – be they individual, collaborative, national-based, comparative – drawn from all parts of the world. Such a flow diffuses and circulates through the usual media of seminars, conferences, journal articles and books (including visual and digital forms) in the brave new world of global information and communications technologies. In fact the traditional infrastructure empowering this scape has already been in place for a long time: universities, social science faculties and research institutes, publishing companies and their distributors, including numerous journal production houses which straddle both the 'centre' and 'periphery' of the world-system. In its original vision, the idea of 'scape' is more fluid, more interactive and 'flowy' than a 'world-system' concept and to a large extent, it dilutes the rigid distinction between 'centre' and 'periphery' found in the latter. Indeed, in its ideal form, it would also be possible for knowledge production to be conducted in a playing field that approximates Khondker's notion of 'genuine globalism', i.e it can be located anywhere in

this 'scape', be it at the 'centre', 'semi-periphery' or 'periphery'. But as mentioned, it is also a highly contested playing ground. However, by opting for a 'scape' rather than a 'world system' framework, it logically provides more social space for transnational fusion and hybridisation of theoretical ideas and concepts between the different parts of the 'scape'.

### **From 'Centre' to 'Transnational' as a Hybridising Base for Knowledge Production**

I propose that in the context of this social science knowledge 'scape', the 'transnational' becomes a crucial meeting ground for knowledge production, between the 'centre' and 'periphery' mediated by the process of *hybridisation*. Implicit in the idea of 'knowledge' is the embeddedness of theory and concepts, as 'knowledge' in essence, refers to a set of empirical data and information that is organised and interpreted by theory and concepts. It is pertinent here to note that in social science, theory building is the product of the dialectical relationship between theory and the empirical world. My argument here is that the 'periphery' is not just a reservoir of empirical data: indeed the so-called 'empirical domain' at the 'periphery' is equally capable in generating conceptual inputs and analytical innovations into the existing corpus of the theoretical formulation hatched at the 'centre'.

I also suggest that in response to the allegation of 'knowledge dependence', we should move the discourse of knowledge production from the realm of the abstract to the that of 'the concrete', to the site where actual research is conducted, in order to analyse how these empirical contents make their 'insertions' into the theoretical domain (i.e the theories generated at the 'centre'), and how these existing theories are re-modified, re-worked, re-formulated and innovated in the process. This then is the articulation of the *transnational*, i.e when the theoretical/conceptual nuances extracted from the empirical periphery ( call it 'indigenous', 'local' or whatever) are *hybridised* with the initial theoretical contents from the 'centre'. As an anthropologist, the domain of the 'concrete'(empirical) brings me to consider the site of 'anthropological fieldworking'.

### **On Situating Anthropological Fieldworking**

From the perspective of anthropological practice, fieldworking becomes the site of the 'concrete' and actual research where existing theories, most of which are formulated at the 'centre', are applied to analyse and interpret the fieldwork empirical data. This is where the question of 'knowledge dependence', mentioned earlier, can also be tested. The logical move is then to follow how the anthropologist juxtaposes and interweaves



between both domains – the western concepts/theories that initially guide him, and how during and after the process of fieldwork, he is able to make new 'insertions' and 'innovations' into the existing theory.

My own fieldworking took me to the 'periphery', amongst Malay plantation labourers who were working and living on an oil palm plantation of Kemaman, located in the southern district of Terengganu state of Peninsular Malaysia. The whole plantation, being 30,000 acres in size had a predominantly Malay labour force of about 3,000, drawn mainly from different villages from the largely Malay populated east coast states of Terengganu and Kelantan, Malaysia. Altogether a period of one year was spent in the field (spread between 1972 and 1975), with the fieldwork being concentrated on the community residing in the main workers' compound (*kongsi*) of the central administrative area of the whole plantation complex. At the time of research, the compound had an estimated population of 1,500 residents, consisting mainly of unskilled field and factory workers (for the oil palm mill).

My own fieldworking was an attempt to capture the proletarianization process of the Malay peasantry and to analyse the contents of their class ideological practice as a wage-labouring class. In the course of undertaking the above research, I became conscious of the 'tyranny' and 'burden' of the Marxist theoretical perspective and concepts of 'class' and 'class consciousness'. I was aware that as an anthropologist/social scientist, I had to work within the framework of the above conceptual framework and all its attendant neo-Marxist revisions and reformulations coming from the 'centre'.

### **Class, Consciousness and Class Ideological Practice: Theoretical Ideas & Reformulations of Marx from the 'Centre'**

A prerequisite for any analysis of ideology must first come to terms with the structural context in which such an ideology is produced. In this respect, the plantation must essentially be seen as "a class-structured system of organisation" (Eric Wolf, 1971, p. 29) in which "the basic distinctions between owners and workers are supported by a complex system of political and legal sanctions." (Ibid, p. 163). In short, the plantation is an economic organization which is organized around the control of its labour force for the appropriation of surplus value in the productive process. It entails a rigid demarcation between those who own the means of production (or those who control labour) and those who sell their labour organized for production (George Beckford, 1972, pp.53-55).

In the context of the main objectives of my research, the present issue arises from a theoretical concern in Marxist analysis about the relationship between class at the level of production relations and class at the level of ideological practice. Its genesis stems not

from Marx per se but rather from a vulgar materialist conception of the reflection and mechanical determination of superstructure by the material base.

According to Rude, Marx's "material being" vs. "superstructure" relationship

"becomes an endless conundrum and has been a hotly debated theme, susceptible to varying interpretations since Marx first penned his famous phrase in the *Critique of Political Economy*. Taken literally, the formulations he then used appear to justify those 'determinists'-and critics of Marx- who have insisted that the 'superstructure' (including consciousness and ideas) must, according to Marxist theory, be a mere and a direct reflection of the base from which it emanates. Others, however, have argued that ideas and ideology, while in the first instance owing to their existence to man's material being, can at crucial moments in history, assume, temporarily at least, an independent role. While Marx's earlier 'philosophical' formulations were either ambivalent or appeared to favour the first interpretation, there seems little doubt that both Marx's and Engel's historical writings -*The Eighteenth Brumaire* and *Peasant War in Germany*, for instance, lend support to the second" ( Rude, 1980, pp. 18-19).

Hence when a disjuncture exists at the level of consciousness or ideological practice which does not seem to conform to "some infrastructure that logically precedes it," such an ideology "thus becomes . . . imaginary, or epiphenomenal" (Kahn, 1981, p.49). Kahn suggests that such an approach must be abandoned, "because economic and political structures are not directly perceivable and because ideological systems are themselves semi-autonomous-the product of their own internal properties as much as of economic and political constraints." (Kahn 1978, p. 104).

In his reformulation of the problem, Laclau questions the assumption of a necessary correlation between class existence at the structural and the superstructural level: "Classes are poles of antagonistic production relations which have no necessary form of existence at the ideological and political levels" (Laclau, 1977, p. 159). Thus the disjuncture is not essentially at the level of concrete experience but of theory itself, as has been neatly put by Norton: "Theory of the nature of inequalities in relations of production is not *ipso facto* a theory of consciousness and action. . . . Consciousness is a distinct domain of social reality determined partly by material interests, but in ways not necessarily complying with a logic deduced by an analyst of class."(Norton, 1981, pp.

4-5).

Most of these above authors recognize the flexibility of consciousness and action in relation to class determinations. Thus while the ability of human beings to act as “subject-incumbents of specific class positions” is still premised on their formation “as class subjects by class ideologies” which are analytically defined on the basis of production relations, these “class ideologies,” however, “exist in various kinds of articulation with non-class ideologies. ” (Therborn, 1980, p.72). In other words, at this level of operation, there may be no necessary logic why non-class values or contents should be *totally* displaced by class elements.

Laclau, in his work on ideology, distinguishes two central contradictions in the social formation-class contradiction and the “power-bloc vs people” contradiction (giving rise to “class interpellation” and “popular democratic interpellation” respectively) - and on this basis, asserts that the ideological sphere cannot be reduced to a direct expression of class interests. What may occur is that these popular democratic (or non-class) ideologies (interpellations) are *articulated* with class ideological discourses which then becomes the basis of political action promoting class objectives.

As Laclau states it:

“Every class struggles at the ideological level simultaneously as class and as the people, or rather, tries to give coherence to its ideological discourse by presenting its class objectives as the consummation of popular objectives”

(Laclau, op. cit., p. 109).

“Classes exist at the level of the ideological and political in a process of articulation and not of reduction. . . . *Articulation requires, therefore, the existence of non-class contents-interpellations and contradictions-which constitute the raw material on which class ideological practices operate.*”  
(ibid, p. 161).

The above reformulation, hinging on the process of articulation, is not only a more useful theoretical pursuit than the rather purist search for some idealized notion of class consciousness (1) ( or a resort to a false consciousness type of explanation, but is also an approach which lends itself more readily to operationalization at the level of empirical inquiry and investigation. It gives cognizance to the fact that at the level of concrete experience, class subjects are also people (2), and that as people they also have other

non-class ideational resources (universal, cultural or ethnic) with which class ideology can exist in various forms of articulation. The analysis herein points to the limitations of a theoretical perspective which attempts to reduce the emerging proletarian ideology simply to a reflection of the material base. It is therefore suggested, following Laclau, that the synthesis at the ideological level should not be seen as one in which class has displaced *all* other non-class values. Rather the existence of class at this level must be conceptualized as being in a process of articulation which requires the existence of non-class contents.

Thompson (1968: 9) also provides another lead as to the problematic inherent in the Marxist conception of class consciousness when he states: “*Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embedded in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms*” (emphasis mine). James Scott’s seminal work on ‘peasant moral economy’ (1976: 160) also points to the value of exploring the ‘emic’ anthropological perspective, rather than endorsing an abstract view of “exploitation”, as evident in his assertion below:

*“If the analytical goal of a theory of exploitation is to reveal something about the perceptions of the exploited – about their sense of exploitation, their notion of justice, their anger- it must begin not with an abstract normative standard but with the real actors. Such an approach must start phenomenologically at the bottom and ask what the peasants’ or workers’ definition of the situation is* (emphasis mine).

For both Thompson and Scott, it is clear that the emphasis on exploring “experiences”, “cultural terms” and “real actors” or “what the peasants’ or workers’ definition of the situation is”, is a call to probe into the realm of the ‘concrete’ and empirical, in order to bring to bear these ‘empirical contents’ back to the domain of theory and ‘the abstract’.

### **The Empirical Domain: The Poetics of Emic Malay Working Class “Experiences”**

For the Malay workers, the class basis of organization defines their role and status position in relation to the non- producers ,the owners or those with capital (*pemodal*) , employers (*majikan*) and the supervisors as those whose primary task is “work selling labour power” (*kerja jual tenaga*) and whose position in the hierarchy is without access to either authority (*kuasa*) or control in the system. Even outside the workplace this class-status dichotomy is equally determining. Socially and spatially the labourers constitute a distinct community of their own: they reside together in a separate living compound typified by *kongsi* houses, away from the rest of the plantation community, yet

are unfree from the jurisdiction of the plantation authority system.

Theoretically, under capitalist relations of production the labourer's social worth is primarily measured in terms of the labour power which he can provide. The Kemaman plantation has features of a 'new style plantation' which according to Wolf is impersonal and does not cater to the "status needs" of the worker. In such a system, its social relations are mechanical and contractual; the worker is evaluated solely in terms of his role as a provider of muscular energy and other aspects of his social and cultural worth are irrelevant to those who wield authority and control the organization. Relations of domination are not mediated "through cultural forms that bear the personal stamp" (. Wolf, op. cit., p. 168) (3). Confronted by such a system, the Malay workers begin to internalize a proletarian ethos in which their social existence is primarily determined by "work selling labour power" (*jual tenaga*). Hence such comments as: "*This company is only interested in us purely for work*"; "*Outside work, they are not bothered about the coolies*"; "*We are like the company=s cows, let loose in the field for eight hours a day.*" Hence for the years when the company was concentrating its capital outlay on land development rather than on labour welfare, they were remembered by the workers as a period of denial of their rights to subsistence and reciprocity ( after Scott's concept of 'peasant moral economy',1976).

To a large extent, workers are able to accommodate to their role in the overall division of labour as the main providers of muscular energy. Nor is there any rejection on their part of the plantation class-status institution, or resentment against the idea of capital investment and profit-making . More importantly for the workers at this level of existence is that their human worth, or dignity ( the Malay cultural term is: *maruah*,) is still intact. The status of a coolie or labourer, however low, does not mean a loss of their *maruah* or dignity as human beings. They are coolies but not as yet animals or slaves. In the overall division of labour, they, like other human beings, are simply "searching for a living" (*sama-sama cari makan*); the question of loss of *maruah* does not arise and is irrelevant. What is felt to be "exploitation" at this level still assumes a generalized and instrumental form to which the workers could still accommodate or adjust philosophically.

The danger of loss of *maruah* is greatest in the relations around the productive process where the actual physical acts of labour power production and surplus appropriation take place. In this on-going labour process of the capitalist system, the confrontation between capital and labour takes on a new dimension-capitalist exploitation becomes personalized and personally mediated. Here workers enter a set of face-to-face

social relations with their *pegawai* (i.e the ‘official class’) who supervise and control them. The *pegawai* has legitimate claims to “bureaucratic” authority (*kuasa*) and how he asserts his authority to reprimand the worker or instruct him as to how, when and how much to work, may inflict upon him a sense of moral suffering and a loss of his human dignity. It is through such instances that exploitation becomes personalized, and the feeling of being nothing more than a mere commodity of labour hits the worker right on his face. He becomes stripped of his *maruah*. He actually feels like an animal (*binatang*), a cow (*lembu*), a slave (*hamba*), a bundle of muscular energy with no human face. I refer to such personal concern by workers over ‘exploitation’ towards their ‘status’ rather than their ‘economic’ well-being as one that is based on a concept of ‘status exploitation’, which of course, is a part of the overall ‘class exploitation’. Moments of such ‘exploitation’ are captured below, as expressed by the workers themselves, based on their experience of the plantation labour process:

*Just because he is masta or pegawai he thinks he can treat us like slaves here-Hey here! Hey there!*

*Just because he has a higher rank, he thinks he can treat us coolies like rubbish by the roadside!*

*We are always chased out or abused in the factory. He (the pegawai) always barks at us, “If you want to work, work!!f not, you can go home!” Already two workers have been scolded like that and they both have left=.*

*We don=t want to hear them go on telling us, “You stupid cow! If you don=t want to work, you can go home!” Never for one moment should we let them feel that they can treat us like cows, depending on them for food here!*

*This factory does not want people who have moral etiquette (budi bahasa). They only want people who can eat people!*

*Workers have always told me that if they were to follow their emotions, they would have thrown him (a pegawai) into the boiler, so that he would turn to ashes.*

*The above pegawai has many times committed acts of inhumanity to these workers who are thirsty for work by abusing them with words that hurt the feelings of the workers*

*under his charge. . . . We feel that what is contained in the body of the pegawai is full of thoughts to make the workers suffer. We on behalf of the workers feel anxious and worried in case anything unpleasant were to occur since both sides would be in trouble. If they were to follow their emotions, all these things would surely happen . . .*

(part of a letter from the plantation union committee to the management)

*The pegawai mentioned. . . has always caused great unrest amongst the workers. He always uses his authority to hurt our feelings . . . with his harsh and rough action, even though the workers concerned may have only committed a small mistake, which is an aspect of human character. . . . Some proper action should be taken . . . before anything unpleasant is done by the workers who are always harbouring their grudges toward him.*

(part of a letter by an ordinary worker written to outside authorities)

The above examples are instances or moments in the productive process in which authority is being asserted to control or appropriate labour power, in this case, through language and verbal communication. On the other hand, a *pegawai* would also resort to other means and ways of forcing the workers to work harder than usual in order to maximize productivity for the company and in so doing, he gains recommendations from his superiors for promotion or bonus increment. Such an act is called *tekan* by the workers (to *tekan* literally means “to press”). Both types of action cited above are perceived by workers as variants of personalized modes of exploitation whose immediate impact is to inflict upon them a sense of moral suffering and reduce their human status to that of a mere commodity of labour. Indeed, one can say that a crucial element in the workers’ emic perspective of ‘exploitation’ is the notion of ‘status exploitation’. This then is their personalised notion of ‘class exploitation.’

In the above context of peasants becoming proletarians, I would like to add on to Scott’s notion of peasant moral economy, the idea of a proletarian moral economy, namely **workers’ rights to human dignity and social worth** (*maruah*). For the workers, then, their everyday class struggle is essentially an ongoing struggle in the labour process to sustain and preserve these rights to their ‘personal moral economy of *maruah*’. The moral regulator is sought in the principle of *timbang rasa* (their cultural concept of empathy; to *timbang*: literally means to “weigh” – such as to weigh ‘the pros and cons’ - and to *rasa*: to “feel”). According to them, acts of ‘status exploitation’ which inflict upon them loss of *maruah* occur because the values of those who control them are not governed by the spirit (*semangat*) of empathy. Only when the assertion of authority is guided by this “spirit” would workers experience no loss of human worth or status. Ideally the spirit

of *timbang rasa*, they argue, should be forthcoming voluntarily, based on human sensitivity. But if it does not, then workers themselves feel that they should be the ones to initiate action to instil this moral component into the values of their immediate superiors. There is thus a strong belief that: “*We must be the people who should ‘teach’ (ajar) them so that they can understand timbang rasa. If we protest (lawan) everytime they ‘press’ us, after a while they will soon know the ways of timbang rasa.*”

Hence acts of personal or social protest against the *pegawai*, ranging from verbal appeals or outbursts to defiance or, more extreme still, by actual physical action, become intricately tied to the workers’ desire to ‘teach’ the spirit of *timbang rasa* to those individuals who control them. *Timbang rasa* is thus an integral moral and ideological component of the proletarian consciousness and their protest is intricately related to the preservation of social worth and dignity (*maruah*) of human beings despite their class-status differences. The spirit of *timbang rasa* is not directed against roles, institutions or the class structure; its rationale is built upon a universal human praxis which accommodates class inequalities and the social division of labour: “*We must have timbang rasa. We are both in search of a living (Kita Mesti ada timbang rasa. Kita sama-sama cari malum).*”

### **Towards a Hybridised/Syncretic Proletarian Theoretical Discourse and Class Ideological Practice**

Clearly, this class ideological practice draws its impetus and strength from hybridisation between both class and non-class values. Crucial to the latter is a more universal identity and status of proletarians as "people" or human beings, but mediated through the cultural nuances of indigenous culture, through Malay concepts such as *maruah* and *timbang rasa*. Such articulation emerges by virtue of the fact that they “experience” ‘class’ in various ways.

Firstly, they experience these relations as a class, in which their social existence, role and status is primarily defined in terms of the labour power (*tenaga*) that they can sell. The emergence of this ideology as a dominant proletarian ethos is clearly evident from the plantation fieldworking data. Essentially this ideology emphasizes the equality of sharing a similar life-chance and class-status position among those who are at the lowest rung of the plantation hierarchy and whose role is to provide labour power in the system. It is this same ideological underpinning (combined with instrumentalism) that also becomes the main source for the formation of the working class as a political community. This aspect approximates closely to the Marxist idea of ‘class’ as a community rather than class as



just an economic category.

Secondly, they experience these relations as “people” or as human beings. This aspect is intricately related to the first, specifically to the process of commoditization of man through personalized forms of exploitation in the labour process. The concern here is with the loss of human dignity or their moral and social worth (*maruah*) as human beings. What emerges at the ideological level is an egalitarian norm, handled through the concept of *timbang rasa* which emphasizes human empathy on the basis of “the equality of men deriving from their intrinsic personal or human worth” (Jayawardena, 1968, p. 413). The thrust of this ideology is on change at the level of personal human values rather than on existing roles, institutions, class structures or the division of labour. The emphasis of this equality “exists outside the system of social stratification”; it is instead “rooted in the human condition, in the equality of men as human beings, in their similar propensities to feel, to suffer and to enjoy” (ibid.). It is an egalitarianism which accepts the socioeconomic differences of human beings ‘in search of a living’.”

Thirdly, they experience these relations as Malays. Terms such as *timbang rasa* and *maruah* represent a cultural category and idiom of a specific ethnic group, hence they constitute an important *cultural* dimension of ethnicity. By this I mean ethnicity as a typification of shared knowledge, ideational resources, cultural concepts, norms, values or symbols which relate to how a particular ethnic group handles and understands certain social relations or phenomena. Indeed, as I cited with Thompson’s earlier, this cultural dimension of ethnicity may be the very source of class consciousness in the way in which these class experiences are handled in “cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems ideas and institutional forms” Indeed under certain conditions, these “cultural terms” may also transcend their original cultural origins and specificities and take on a universal character and form at the level of ideological discourse. Theoretically, the concepts of *timbang rasa* and *maruah* are all culturally derived, and specific to Malays. Yet these are also translatable even by the Malay proletarians themselves into a universal form and assume their own viability to underlie relations between individuals as “people” or human beings.

My anthropological fieldworking spent among Malays working as labourers in plantation society reveals the essence of their proletarian moral economy and class consciousness: namely, that it resides in the cultural and indigenous concept of *maruah*. Whilst many could accommodate to the ‘economics’ of ‘class exploitation’, in their everyday experiences of ‘class’ in the work place, in their personal encounters with the plantation officials who control them, what they value most is to sustain their rights to

*maruah* so that it remains unscathed and untarnished. Hence rights to *maruah* become the essence of the Malay proletarian economy and underlies their notion of justice (*keadilan*), a transgression of which would create a deep loss of their moral worth as human (*manusia*) and engender different forms of resistance and protest. The above perspective moves the theoretical analysis to that of a ‘proletarian moral economy’, beyond Scott’s notion of ‘peasant moral economy’ which only revolves around rights to subsistence and reciprocity (Scott, 1976; also see : Zawawi, 1983; 1998c; 2010).

## **Concluding Remarks**

There are several reasons that underlie the above approach and discourse.

Firstly, it is indirectly a response to Evers’ observation of ‘knowledge dependence’ among local social scientists in Southeast Asia towards western social science ideas and concepts. In order to grapple with the epistemological issues at stake (including ‘indigenisation’), the problem cannot be generalised nor gauged purely at the level of the abstract and the statistical.. The issue, I feel, is best problematised and further interrogated at the level of concrete empirical research (fieldworking) .Such a method will further reveal the complexities and multilayeredness of theory-making, and indeed its transnationality , and ultimately, the intricacies of the ‘hybridisation’ process. For Asianists and anthropologists fieldworking in the region, such a qualitative interrogation will also facilitate further dialogues and sharing of different research experiences, i.e by reviewing their own respective empirical research discourses at the ‘ level of the concrete’ in order to put to test and resolve questions of ‘knowledge dependence’ or Southeast Asian ‘sociology of underdevelopment’, including ‘indigenisation’ .

Secondly, and closely related to the core of my arguments and also to the first reason, the approach that I propose is to demonstrate the possibility of transnationalising theory-making at the ‘periphery’. I suggest to undertake this via a process of ‘hybridisation’, premised on the principle that theory building is the product of the dialectics between theory and the empirical domain, which can take place in the ‘periphery’. For the moment, this alternative seems to be a more viable option compared to an earlier perspective which only pays homage to the ‘centre’ as the sole producer of theories and concepts. Such a mode of analysis does not totally delink social science knowledge production from the ‘centre’ but recognises that any theoretical innovation should take place in the context of existing cumulative knowledge production, which obviously still revolves around the ‘centre’. However, by shifting our wider paradigm from a ‘world system’ to a social science knowledge ‘scape’ perspective, it is hoped that the rigid distinctions between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ will increasingly become more

blurred, and make room for greater fluidity in forging effective transnational theoretical synergies within the global epistemic community among social scientists located in the different parts of this 'scape'.

### Notes

1. As Shivji remarks: "In fact classes hardly become fully *class* conscious except in situations of intense political struggle. Class consciousness does not fully draw upon individuals until they are locked in political battles...Actually such conclusions are not only too easy to arrive at by interviewing a few hundred workers in non-revolutionary situations and by computing unfavourable answers as evidence that workers are not class conscious," Issa Shivji, *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 8.
2. According to Rude, Gramsci has, for instance, already argued that "attention must also be paid to the simpler and less structured ideas circulating among the common people, often 'contradictory' and confused and compounded of folklore, myth and day-to-day popular experience. So ideology and consciousness, in his view. . . are extended to embrace the 'traditional' classes, including the common people other than those engaged in industrial production, as well." ( George Rude, op. cit. p. 9).
3. According to Wolf, "The new-style plantation... dispenses altogether with personalised phrasings of its technical requirements. Guided by the idea of rational efficiency in the interests of maximum production, it views the labour force as a reservoir of available muscular energy, with each labourer representing a roughly equivalent amount of such energy ... The worker who provides a given amount of muscular energy is remunerated in wages. Otherwise his life-risks or life-chances are of no moment to the planners and managers of production and distribution ... It does not extend credit to individual workers, nor differentiate between workers according to their different needs, or the urgency of their respective needs. It assumes no risks for the physical or psychological survival of the people who power its operations. At the same time, the new-style plantation is not an apparatus for the servicing of the status needs of its workers or managers. It thus bars the worker effectively from entering into personalised relationships with the administrative personnel." ( Ibid., p. 169.)

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## 「世界システム」から社会科学知識「スケープ」パースペクティブへ：周辺における人類学的フィールドワーキングとトランスナショナルな理論形成

Zawawi Ibrahim

本論文は、「世界システム」(Kuwayama, 2004)の文脈における社会科学知識の生産の問題に対する人類学的介入を提示するものである。「世界システム」は、その理論構成の基盤は歴史的に、「周辺」というよりも「中心」におかれている。日本の人類学者の桑山は、ウォーラスティンのこの概念を人類学そのものに適用に、人類学が「中心」「準周辺」「周辺」において不均等に分割されていることに言及した。こうした不平等な認識的な討議場を前提にすれば、「理論的未発達」と「知識的従属」という非難が「周辺」の社会科学学問界になされてきたことは驚くにはあたらない(King, 2008)。これまでのところ「周辺」からの認識論的反応は、ヨーロッパ中心主義(植民地知識)と支配的なアングロアメリカ的な理論範型に対抗する方法としては、「脱植民地化人類学」「ヨーロッパの地方化」「土着化」といった議論の形をとって行われている(Chakranarty, 2000; Atal, 1981; S.Hussein Alatas, 1977; S. Farid Alatas, 2006)。

本論文は、アパデュライの「スケープス」(2005)概念に導かれて、桑山の「世界システム」の概念を別の認知レベルへと上昇させようとするものである。すなわち、今まで「見過ごされていたスケープ」—社会科学知識「スケープ」(Zawawi 2013: 1-2)—に着目する。スケープは、トランスナショナルで、不均等で、対立・論争を免れるものではないけれど、この「スケープ」に位置する「中心」「周辺」両方の知識生産者間の理論の交換、総合のための相互的な活動フィールドとして優れている。「スケープ」という観念は、そのオリジナルなヴィジョンにおいても、「世界システム」概念よりも多次元的であり、より流動的、「フロー的」であって、この特徴は、一定程度、世界システム概念にみられる「中心」と「周辺」の間の固定的な区別を弱めるように作用する。人類学にとって、以上のようなトランスナショナルな総合の可能性は、以下のような理解の前提に立つ。「周辺」におけるフィールドワークは、経験的データを収集するためのものではなくて、既存の理論と概念形成に取り組む基盤を提供するものである。社会科学における根本的な原理は理論形成が理論的実践と経験的調査との弁証法的な関係に基づいているところにある、ことを我々自身自覚することが重要である。この結果は、起源からトランスナショナルな理論的総合の形態を取り、必然的に「ハイブリッド」である。これは、その起源が「中心」でも「周辺」でもなく、その分析的資源を「中心」で確立された理論的知識体と、「周辺」における調査によって活性化され、ローカルな、文化的な、土着的経験的領域から派生する概念的なニュアンス、その両者から引き出していることを意味している。従って人類学的フィールドワークはこのトランスナショナルでハイブリッド化された理論形成プロジェクトにおける必然的で、重要なサ

イトになり、環となる。本稿のケーススタディは、私自身のプランテーション社会におけるマレー労働者階級に関するフィールドワークを介して、「中央」におけるマルクス主義の「階級意識」と階級イデオロギー実践を「周辺」に持ち込むことを問題化したものである。

**Keywords:** ‘world system’, social science knowledge ‘scape’, transnationalising, hybridisation, indigenisation, anthropology, fieldworking